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Multi-stakeholder dialogue

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Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The participation of representatives of major groups, as identified in Agenda 21, in the sessions of the United Nations Forum on Forests has improved significantly over time. The Forum has recognized the value of their contribution and encouraged their active participation. Pursuant to Forum resolutions 1/1 and 7/1, a multi-stakeholder dialogue is held as a component of every session.

At the eleventh session of the Forum, the dialogue will be held during the first week of the session, during which representatives of the major groups will share their perspectives on issues relating to the overall theme "Forests: progress, challenges and the way forward for the international arrangement on forests".

The present note provides an account of developments since the tenth session of the Forum and information on the arrangements for the dialogue at the eleventh session.

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I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Forum on Forests was established by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2000/35. It is open to all Member States and is to operate in a transparent and participatory manner. The participation of a wide range of forest-related stakeholders is considered to be a key component of the sustainable management of forests. For that reason, the Forum has, since its inception, welcomed the participation of the nine major groups identified in Agenda 21 (business and industry, children and youth, farmers and small forest landowners, indigenous peoples, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, the scientific and technological community, women, and workers and trade unions) in the implementation of sustainable forest management.

2. The Forum has made significant progress in enhancing the participation of stakeholders in its work. At its tenth session, it adopted resolution 10/1 on progress in the implementation of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests, regional and subregional inputs, forests and economic development, and enhanced cooperation. It invited Member States to enhance the role and full participation of all relevant stakeholders in the forest sector, including indigenous peoples and local communities, with regard to sustainable forest management, opportunities for employment and training, rural development, technology innovation and transfer, research and development and diversification of markets, goods and services. It encouraged Member States, member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, regional and subregional organizations and relevant stakeholders to share experiences, lessons learned and best practices regarding sustainable forest management, including through demonstration sites and pilot projects. It encouraged regional and subregional organizations and processes and major groups to continue to provide coordinated input to the Forum and invited Member States, the donor community and member organizations of the Partnership to support those efforts. In addition, it requested the Forum secretariat to continue and strengthen its activities to effectively engage all major groups.

3. During the intersessional period, the Forum secretariat worked in close collaboration and cooperation with the focal points of each major group[1] to coordinate, plan and prepare for the multi-stakeholder dialogue and to enhance the participation of major groups in activities relating to the international arrangement on forests, in accordance with the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council. The format and content of the dialogue are proposed by the focal points, in consultation with the Forum secretariat, and submitted to the Bureau of the Forum for consideration.

4. To ensure their full participation in the general discussion, the major groups established associations and networks to promote capacity-building and facilitate the exchange of experiences among members. They developed, among other things, a joint discussion paper and presentation based on common concerns. While seven of the nine major groups will be represented in the dialogue, two — the business and industry and local authorities major groups — will not be represented, given that there is no appropriate network that could contribute on behalf of a range of members of those two groups.

[1] A complete list of the focal points is available from www.un.org/esa/forests/contacts-major_groups.html.

5. The present note has been prepared to facilitate the dialogue. A joint discussion paper, prepared by the focal points of most of the major groups[2] in consultation with their networks and facilitated by the Major Groups Partnership on Forests, the coordinating organization of major groups of the Forum, is contained in an addendum to the present note (E/CN.18/2015/6/Add.1). It will form the basis for the dialogue during the session.

6. Recommendations on enhancing stakeholder participation in the international arrangement on forests in the future are contained in the report of the Secretary-General on reviewing the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests and consideration of all future options (E/CN.18/2015/2).

II. Enhancing stakeholder participation in the future work of the Forum

7. Civil society organizations are an integral part of the Forum. Their participation can ensure the success of the Forum in its pursuit of sustainable forest management, a greater sense of ownership of the outcomes and more effective action on the ground. Their active engagement in the multi-stakeholder dialogue process is particularly important in ensuring that discussions at the eleventh session encompass a wide range of perspectives and concerns regarding the international arrangement on forests in the future.

8. During the intersessional period, the Forum made significant progress in enhancing the contributions of major groups to its work. Representatives contributed significantly to work on the international arrangement on forests. They participated in a facilitative dialogue workshop on the arrangement, held in Vienna in October 2013, and in the first and second meetings of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Ad Hoc Expert Group on the International Arrangement on Forests, held in Nairobi in February 2014 and in New York in January 2015. In response to a call by the Forum secretariat, the focal points submitted two inputs to the Expert Group: a joint submission from all major groups and a submission by the children and youth major group. The proposals and comments on the various issues under consideration were submitted for discussion in an open and participatory manner alongside those of other experts. Such a practice should be continued in the future, including as part of any intersessional activities.

9. Major groups will convene an initiative in March 2015 entitled: "Sustainable forest management: designing the vehicles for securing the means of implementation". The initiative will provide an opportunity for representatives of major groups to contribute substantively to discussions on the review of the international arrangement on forests. The main objective is to enhance the implementation of Forum decisions for the promotion of sustainable forest management within the framework of establishing an institution with the means to develop and implement future policy and to develop specific recommendations for consideration at the eleventh session. The outcomes of the initiative will be presented at the session.

[2] Children and youth, indigenous peoples, the scientific and technological community, farmers and small forest landowners, women, workers and trade unions. The non-governmental organizations major group did not participate, citing a lack of time to engage in full consultations.

III. Multi-stakeholder dialogue at the eleventh session of the Forum

10. The Forum has consistently encouraged the participation of forest-related organizations belonging to major groups in the multi-stakeholder dialogue and, where appropriate, in relevant regional and subregional discussions in order for them to provide their perspectives and input with regard to the Forum's programme of work and engage in an exchange of views and experiences with other participants. The dialogue process encourages the balanced participation of stakeholders from major groups and the various regions. It has proved to be a unique opportunity for forest-related stakeholders to contribute meaningfully to the discussions on the Forum's main themes, thereby enriching the international arrangement on forests through a diversity of views on issues relating to sustainable forest management and the implementation of the non-legally binding instrument on forests and its four global objectives on forests.

11. The dialogue will be held on the morning of 5 May 2015. Representatives of major groups will present the findings set out in the joint discussion paper, including the priority areas and recommendations. The presentation will be followed by an interactive policy discussion with representatives of Member States and the member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests. Senior representatives of major groups will also be invited to present their views and comments during the high-level dialogue with the heads of the regional organizations to be held on the afternoon of 14 May. Throughout the session, they will be invited to present their views and comments at the discretion of the Chair and presiding Vice-Chairs.

IV. Conclusion

12. The Forum has a tradition of openness and transparency in its working modalities that provides opportunities for stakeholders to participate and present their views on all aspects of sustainable forest management policy and practices. The multi-stakeholder dialogue and the Forum intersessional activities and meetings are critical vehicles for the active and meaningful engagement of civil society. The Forum secretariat and the focal points of major groups closely collaborate and engage in consultations. Maintaining the multi-stakeholder nature of the Forum and strengthening the broad and active participation of all stakeholders is fundamental for the successful promotion of sustainable forest management in the period beyond 2015. Given that the Forum will, at its eleventh session, decide on the future of the international arrangement on forests, it is important that Member States lay the foundation for a strong and participatory arrangement that will involve the major group representatives that traditionally participate in its work and other key stakeholders more broadly.